

*Bo Lindsley (J. B.)*

AN ADDRESS

ON THE

Life and Character

OF

ROBERT M. PORTER, M.D.,

LATE PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NASHVILLE.

BY

JOHN BERRIEN LINDSLEY, M.D.,

CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY

DELIVERED AT NASHVILLE, NOV. 8, 1856.

PUBLISHED BY THE CLASS.

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NASHVILLE, TENN.:

PRINTED BY E. VALLETTE.

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# University of Nashville, Tenn.,

NOVEMBER 13TH, 1856.

## *To the Chancellor of the University :*

DEAR SIR :—At a meeting of the Class of the Medical Department of the University of Nashville, it was resolved that a committee be appointed, consisting of one member from each State, to solicit you to furnish the Class with a copy of your very excellent eulogy on the Life and Character of our much-esteemed Professor R. M. PORTER, deceased, in order that we may publish the same. As constituting that committee, we therefore very respectfully and most earnestly solicit a copy of said Address.

Very respectfully your obedient servants,

E. M. DUPREE, S. C.,  
P. B. STOVALL, Miss.,  
J. COLLINS, N. Y.,  
A. R. ALEXANDER, Ala.,  
A. T. LIPFORD, Fla.,  
JNO. B. FINLEY, Ark.,  
McD. BLANCHARD, Ga.,  
J. R. G. FAUCETT, N. C.,

E. F. FINNEY, R. I.,  
WM. R. WALKER, Cherokee Nation,  
BEN. S. WOOD, Ky.,  
W. G. DANIEL, Texas,  
G. T. BARTLETT, Mo.,  
N. C. MILLER, Tenn.,  
W. B. BARROW, La.,  
T. H. BERNARD, Ill.

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### GENTLEMEN:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your note of the 13th instant, requesting, in behalf of the Medical Class, a copy of the Address delivered before them.

With high appreciation of this honor, I very cheerfully comply with the request.

With great respect, your obedient servant,

J. BERRIEN LINDSLEY.

To E. M. DUPREE, }  
and others, } *Committee.*

NASHVILLE, Nov. 14th, 1856.



## ADDRESS.

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THE fashion of this world passeth away; and it matters not how eagerly and earnestly we are devoted to the pursuits of this present life, or how successful and useful in carrying forward enterprises of value to our fellow-men, and productive of honor, esteem, and enjoyment to ourselves; death must inevitably come and interrupt it all. The work ceases not: the world goes on; but our part is finished. So it has been with all men through all time. So it will be with us. The cessation of life will rob us of the bright sun, the resplendent earth, the joyous air, and the cheering companionship of birds and beasts and men, and suddenly bring all our plans and purposes, hopes, expectations, and fears, to an end.

This great fact, this marvellous change—the greatest that can happen to any of us, and which is sure to happen to each one of us—is, of all things upon earth, the most difficult to realize and bring home to our own consciousness. It is perhaps best comprehended when those with whom

we are most intimately connected by ties of kindred, or by association in business or position, are called away. Then do we feel the reality, the nearness, and the certainty of this change; and though human reason and science cannot tear away the dark veil enveloping its character, we can yet rejoice that a beneficent Creator has given us a revelation which clears up the mystery, and pours a flood of light into the gloomy recesses of the grave.

Such is the lesson taught us by the providence of God since last we publicly assembled as a corps of teachers and pupils. One of our number, active, earnest, faithful, sanguine and devoted in the carrying out of this undertaking, has been removed in the prime of life, in the midst of labors of high value to his family, friends, and fellow-citizens; and it is now our province to learn wisdom from this appointment of God, and to draw encouragement and profitable instruction from considering the life and character of our late lamented colleague. No greater riches can any man leave his family, friends, associates, than the memory of a character lovely in all its aspects, and of a life stainless in all its course. This is an inheritance which prodigal heirs cannot squander, which the lapse of time only brightens, and which will descend beyond all contingency to those who may own his blood or name, even to remote generations. Such was the character possessed by our late colleague, and such the tenor of his life in our midst.

Well knowing that I could bring before you no example better calculated to stimulate, encourage, instruct and guide you in the difficult career upon the threshold of which you now stand, than that of Professor Porter, I the more willingly comply with the request of the Medical Faculty to give, on this occasion, an account of his life and character. Though simple and unadorned, our aim will be to make this account truthful and correct.

How uncertain, may we well exclaim, are the arrangements of men! how sure the appointments of God! Less than five months since, he was preparing to fulfil the duty assigned him by the Faculty of addressing the class at the opening of this session, upon some topic connected with medicine: now another occupies his place at the desk, and himself is the subject of discourse.

ROBERT MASSENGILL PORTER was born April 12th, 1818, in this city.

His father, Alexander Porter, emigrated to this country in August, 1793, from Donegal county, in the north of Ireland. He was of that sturdy race of people, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, which has furnished to our South-western cities and towns so large a number of prudent, sagacious, enterprising and honorable citizens. He first settled in Wilmington, Delaware; then in East Tennessee; and finally in Nashville, where he was for many years a success-



ful merchant. He died of the Asiatic cholera, at Dresden, in the Western District of Tennessee, in April, 1833. His brother, the Rev. James Porter, a Presbyterian clergyman, was distinguished for his learning, ability, and zeal for his country's rights, as he conceived them. Rather than conceal or renounce his political opinions, he preferred to lose his life; having been condemned to an ignominious death by the unjust and hasty sentence of a court-martial, during the troubles in Ireland, in 1798. The two sons of this zealous patriot were cared for by their Tennessee emigrant uncle, and one of them afterwards became widely known as an able jurist, and as United States senator from Louisiana. Firmness of purpose, energy, prudence, diligence, honesty, seem to have been characteristic of this family.

Massengill was the maiden name of Dr. Porter's mother, who was of an influential family in East Tennessee.

Dr. Porter's youth was spent at home, and his school and college education received at Nashville—the former, under the instruction of Moses Stevens, a gentleman who will be long remembered in this region as a thoroughly accomplished, devoted and successful instructor of youth. He was then for four years a member of the Undergraduate Department of the University here, where his teachers were President Lindsley, Dr. Troost, Professors Hamilton and Abednego Stephens—none of whom are now living, but whose pupils occupy many posts of honor and usefulness, and still delight



to recall with praise and gratitude these respected names. His academic course was marked throughout by exact and punctual attention to all the exercises and studies assigned him, by great proficiency in the various branches taught, and by a handsome uprightness of conduct, which won for him the warm esteem of his instructors, as one in whose future usefulness they would reap the reward of their zeal and disinterested love of a profession irksome in its nature, and most niggardly inadequate in its material compensation. His uniform correct deportment, open, ingenuous, and gentlemanly manners, gave him also a high place in the affections of his school and classmates. He seems while at college to have paid special attention to the exercises of the Societies, speaking, debating, and writing. When a member of the Senior Class, he represented the Erosophian Society, at the "Spring Speaking." His oration on this occasion, on "American History," made a strong impression on many who heard it as indicative of learning, judgment, and refined polish, which would certainly secure future eminence to the writer. Among my earliest recollections of college life is a distinct remembrance of the remarks made about this speech, which, by the way, was one of eight delivered by young men of unusual brilliance and promise, a larger proportion of whom than is usual with the actors in college exhibitions, have redeemed the promise thus given and justified the expectations thus raised.

He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in October 1836, and in November entered the Law Department of Harvard University at Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he remained for nearly two years, under the tuition of the distinguished jurists, Story and Greenleaf. He commenced the study of Law with many misgivings as to whether his aversion to public speaking and mingling with men would ever allow him to pursue the practice. However, he was young, and had means, and no subject was better fitted to engage his attention as a branch of useful and entertaining knowledge. On the 29th of August, 1838, he was graduated as Bachelor of Laws, without being present at the Commencement. After leaving Cambridge, he pursued his legal studies for nearly a year in Louisiana, with his cousin, Judge Alexander Porter.

He then returned to Nashville, and on December 4th, 1838, was married to Mary Wharton, daughter of William Williams, Esq., of this vicinity. The following letter from Judge Story, addressed to him on this occasion, may be regarded as illustrative of the friendly interest in his welfare with which he always succeeded in inspiring his teachers:

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 17, 1839.

MY DEAR SIR: I have transmitted your Diploma, which I brought from Cambridge, to the Hon. Mr. Bell, according to your suggestion. Allow me to congratulate you on your

admission to the Bar, and still more so upon your marriage. It is a source of sincere pleasure to me that you have thus become allied to one of my early friends and classmates, whose purity of character and high intellectual qualities have always commanded my warmest respect and praise. Give my kindest regards to your wife, and assure her that I shall ever take the liveliest interest in her welfare, and that I feel proud that one of my own pupils, every way deserving of her affection, has had the good fortune to obtain her hand. May you live together in happiness many, many years, and possess, what is above all price, that mutual devoted love, which gives the highest charm to prosperity, and softens, and soothes, and cheers the heart even in the darkest hours of adversity.

Pray give my truest respects to Mr. Williams, and assure him that as we are descending into the vale of life I feel it among my best consolations, that, distant as we have been from each other, I have been enabled to hold a place in his friendship.

I am affectionately your friend,

JOSEPH STORY.

This marriage, the fruition of an early formed and devoted attachment, was destined to shed happiness upon only a brief portion of his days, as Mrs. Porter lived but a few months after their union : she died March 21st, 1839.

His hopes of domestic happiness and plans of life, thus rudely broken in upon by the hand of death, inclined him to seek retirement from the world, and taught him a severe, but doubtless salutary lesson, on the vanity of all human expectations. He connected himself with the Presbyterian Church in this city, and in June, 1840, became a student in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey. Here, pursuing his studies with his usual diligence, he won a high standing among the six score young men then assembled in the halls of the Seminary, from every portion of the Union. I visited Princeton while he was there, and found him a general favorite for his amiable and noble qualities, and highly respected for his scholarship. On the 15th of May, 1843, he received the certificate of having completed the entire Theological course to the satisfaction of his professors—the two Alexanders, Samuel Miller, and Charles Hodge.

He did not, however, apply to Presbytery for license to preach; but at once turned his attention to the study of the profession which was to be his true calling, and which had been his father's choice for him. He went to Philadelphia, and commenced the study of Medicine under the preceptorship of Dr. Hugh L. Hodge, professor in the University of Pennsylvania. He brought to the study of this comprehensive and difficult science, a mind not only well disciplined by legal and theological studies, but also stored



with much information derived from them of great value to the physician, and by far too often slighted by medical men. Particularly was his theological course of service, as having led him to pay great attention to the mental and moral nature of man. If there is any one defect in the curriculum of medical education more prominent than all others, it is a neglect of these subjects. Man is too much treated of as a mere material mechanism, and the mysterious but mighty influence of the passions, affections, and intellectual powers upon his physical nature, too little understood or recognized.

In consideration of his intention to prosecute his studies abroad, the Medical Faculty waived the rule requiring three years' study, and admitted him to the Doctorate, at the Commencement of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, held April the 4th, 1845.

He immediately set out on a professional visit to Europe, that he might profit by the facilities offered in the continental capitals of pursuing special studies, and also that before confining himself to the drudgery of the practice of medicine he might see something of the Old World, and get whatever of good could be derived from foreign travel. He arrived in Paris on the 24th of May, and went to work studying the language, perfecting himself in Anatomy, and prosecuting various private or special courses of instruction, particularly on subjects belonging to practical medicine and surgery.

While in Europe, whether making long sojourns in the cities, or merely tours of observation, he was ever the diligent student, wasting no time, making medicine his first business, yet taking a lively interest in other matters worthy of note. The works of the great masters in architecture, sculpture and painting, the manners, customs and condition of the people, and the beautiful or sublime scenes of nature, all enlisted his eager attention, and afforded him great enjoyment.

One characteristic belonging to him in a marked degree is fully and strongly displayed in his European correspondence—an intense American feeling. Far from being dazzled by the splendor of accumulated ages, there seen in monarchical wealth and power, enormous armies, fairy-like palaces and churches, immense collections in art, science and nature, and varied, well-furnished institutions of learning, he looked beyond this gay and glittering outside, and saw within the signs of decrepitude, weakness, and decay. Hence he turned with increased affection and longing to his native America, with enlarged views of its capability for a happy and glorious destiny, and with earnest hope that upon its soil a nation should flourish with all the high civilization and art of the European world, but without the defects inherited from an ancient barbarism.

After visiting Italy, Germany, England, Scotland, and Ireland, he returned to the United States, in December,

1847, and soon afterwards opened an office in Nashville. He doubted much the propriety of selecting his native in preference to a distant city, as his home; but having made the choice, he resolved to apply himself to his profession, and patiently bide his time. When, nearly four years subsequently, the Medical Department of the University was established, his professional reputation, as well as previous well-used advantages for a thorough training, led the Trustees and Physicians projecting the school earnestly to solicit his acceptance of the important chair of Anatomy and Physiology.

On July 14th, 1852, he was united in marriage to Mrs. Felicia Grundy Eakin, widow of the late William Eakin, Esq., and daughter of Felix Grundy, late United States' Senator from Tennessee. She is left to mourn his loss, with one little boy, around whom are clustered many hopes.

On July the 1st, 1856, he ceased to live, after an illness of six weeks, and with a perplexing complication of symptoms. The case was doubtless rendered fatal by the imbibition of a blood-poison taken into the system May 27th, from dissecting an offensive subject, while lecturing to the summer class then assembled. He seems always to have been exceedingly susceptible to injury from the offensive attendants upon the dissecting-room, almost amounting to an idiosyncrasy. In his letters from Philadelphia and Paris

we find repeated mention of his having thus been made sick, and compelled for a time to suspend his anatomical studies.\*

But though the immediate cause of his death was extraordinary, and out of our apprehension, yet the main cause is common to us all. The time appointed for him to go the way of all flesh had come. This closes our brief narrative, and all similar narratives—yours and mine after a little time, perhaps a very short time. Had it not been that I feared to weary your patience, his varied correspondence would have furnished rich material for a fuller and more interesting, because more detailed, narration.

Having thus imperfectly followed Prof. Porter through his long and thorough and costly preparation for the duties of active life, and his brief professional term of service, we

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\* The statement here made, in regard to the cause and nature of Dr. Porter's last illness, is based on an opinion expressed by the undersigned, who was Dr. P.'s attending physician. Its correctness is proved by the history and the symptoms of the disorder. Dr. P., on the 27th of May last, when the heat of the weather was and had been for some days extreme for the season, opened, in presence of his class of pupils, a body far advanced in putrefaction, and made it the subject of anatomical demonstration during a period of two hours. The odor emitted was so offensive that some of his audience were driven to the windows, and others without the room. On the succeeding day he was seized with a chill, followed by a fever, the malignant character of which clearly attested its extraordinary origin. One of the most remarkable of his symptoms, as most indicative of the source of his disease, was the presence, without intermission, as he himself described it, of the odor in his nostrils, and the taste in his mouth, of the effluvia of the dissecting-room, in their most offensive forms.



come now to note the result, and to see what manner of man he was in society, and how he fulfilled the duties of the most difficult and responsible of the learned professions, and discharged the obligations of a high public station. We shall find that he had not labored thus long in vain, and that all his varied training was admirably fitted to prepare him for the position he was destined to occupy.

As a member of society in a city of note and influence in the extensive region of country to which it is naturally the capital, his deportment was such as in a remarkable degree to secure the good will and high appreciation of the entire community. Of a diffident and retiring disposition, he was averse to taking any steps that would bring him prominently before the public. And doubtless many of his friends, who knew how faithfully he had used his rich opportunities for mental improvement, were disappointed at the modest, quiet, and unpretending manner in which he commenced his professional course. He was as devoid of all pretension, and as little disposed to show off, as the most sensitive maiden could possibly be. He possessed, however, sterling qualities of heart and head, which more than counterbalanced what, in this age of earnest competition and active pushing ahead, can hardly be esteemed a failing or defect, but from its rareness must rather be considered a virtue, resulting from the consciousness of high qualification and merit, and from a proud and noble independence of spirit. These qua-

lities gave him among his fellow-citizens a repute and esteem which any one at the close of a long life might be proud to have attained.

He was of an amiable and kindly disposition; the last person to wound, by act or word, his neighbor. Where he could not speak well, he preferred to remain silent. Where he had it in his power to do good, he did it quietly and without ostentation. His left hand knew not what his right did. Hence in his daily walk he made many friends, and no enemies.

He was a man of strict integrity and uprightness. His word was as good as his bond. If he swore to his own hurt, he would not change. He would at any time rather be injured in property than injure another. He was truly a specimen of that noble old-fashioned scriptural honesty of principle and conduct, without which no one can be a really good member of society, or worthy to possess the confidence of his fellow-men; and without which human society itself is but a collection of impostors, a den of thieves.

He possessed a clear head and sound judgment, which gave weight to his opinions, and secured to him the utmost confidence of those associated with him as friends, relatives, or colleagues. All such persons—and the list was numerous—regarded him as a wise and safe counsellor, and never regretted having followed his deliberately-given judgment. Indeed, he was not inclined to render an opinion hastily, but

would generally ask time to think upon the matter; and then you could not alter his opinion, and the event would prove its accuracy.

He was a man of firmness and decision. Cautious, but sure in arriving at a conclusion, conviction or purpose, when once formed he adhered to it with the utmost tenacity. There was no fickleness of purpose or action with him. Difficulties would not deter him, nor labor turn him from his plan. This is seen in the diligence and zeal with which he pursued the study of anatomy. Though again and again made sick in the dissecting-room, he again and again returned to the loathsome work, but attractive study, until he had become an accomplished surgeon and anatomist. As it regards practical success in life, this decision of character happily counterpoised his diffidence and aversion to public display. Without it, his thorough professional preparation, and advantages arising from wealth and position, would have been of no avail.

He was a man of Christian faith and hope, and consequently of pure, unblemished life and morals. From a mother's lips he first learned the lessons of Christian piety; which at school and college were again enforced, and afterwards confirmed by the experience of early manhood teaching him the vanity of human plans and wishes. Like all of us, he had his times of doubt and difficulty; for who can mingle in this changeful, fleeting, uncertain, varied

world of men, and not be puzzled, perplexed, amazed, troubled at the mystery of life? But the root of the matter was in him, and he not only died but lived as a Christian. When this is said, all is said: no higher eulogium can be passed upon a friend, companion or associate. Nor need we wonder that a whole community was filled with grief at his untimely end; that those who knew him intimately, and those whose knowledge was that of mere ordinary acquaintance, were so concerned when they heard of his dangerous illness, and manifested such sorrow when they learned that he was no more. From early childhood have I known this goodly city, and truly can, with all who thus know it, bear testimony that it is a place where feelings of good neighborhood and kindly sympathy have ever abounded; and never was there a more striking manifestation of this fact than on the occasion of Dr. Porter's illness and death. Then was it seen how strong is the hold which an ingenuous and profitably spent season of youth, followed by an upright and Christian walk in life, can give one, even in the prime of life, upon a large community, who have either witnessed his youth or been companions of his manhood.

As a physician, the character of Dr. Porter will furnish a subject for profitable and instructive study. He combined in a high degree those qualities and attainments which give dignity and grace to the profession, which from the remotest periods of history have procured it great honor among



men, and which, so long as humanity continues subject to physical ailments, will continue to secure it a first place in the esteem and respect of society.

He had exalted views of his profession, as to its dignity, responsibility and utility. He did not undertake either the study or the practice of medicine merely because it furnished the means of gaining a comfortable or easy livelihood, but because it gave opportunities for making extensive progress in knowledge, and of doing good continually and disinterestedly to his fellow-men. It was with him as it is with all men who truly succeed in the professions called liberal. He loved his profession for its own sake, he studied it for its own sake, and practised from the same motive. This is the peculiar honor and reward of the learned professions, Theology, Law and Medicine. As branches of human knowledge, they are in the highest degree attractive; teaching the mysteries of Divine and human nature; showing the rights and duties man owes to his fellow; or explaining the wonders of man's physical conformation, and the secrets of disease, health, and cure. As conferring that power which ever accompanies the possession of knowledge, they are also invested with a singular charm; those who are proficient, having the happy consciousness of being able, under God, to furnish peace and consolation to the desolate and afflicted, of procuring justice for the wronged and oppressed, and of restoring

health and soundness to the diseased and suffering. These considerations more than compensate the earnest, true-hearted minister, jurist, or physician, for the fact that his calling does not open the way to the acquisition of great wealth and luxury, in any thing like an equal degree with those pursuits which are connected with the material wants and welfare of men.

Entering the profession with these views, Dr. Porter faithfully and conscientiously prepared himself for the discharge of its arduous and responsible duties. Notwithstanding his ample and extensive course of study previous to commencing that of medicine, he neither abridged nor hurried through with his medical education. On the contrary, he devoted to its prosecution more time than do the majority of those who enter upon the practice at the present day. He knew that the offer of his services to the public as a physician would render him liable at any time to be called upon to act in cases where not merely a few days more or less of sickness and pain, but often the patient's recovery and life, would depend upon his knowledge and judgment and skill. This was, in his estimation, a most grave and weighty liability, not to be hastily assumed or carelessly discharged; so he did not commence the practice of medicine until he had made himself well grounded in its principles, and had seen and studied thoroughly the varying phases of disease. Even then we find him shrinking back,

and writing, "As the time approaches, I dread more and more to commence practice."

After getting fairly under way as a practitioner of medicine, he still retained his habits as a diligent student, and was careful to preserve his knowledge of elementary medicine fresh and bright, always ready for use, and also to keep pace with the improvements in this progressive art and science. He knew too well the necessity of continued study to the maintenance of an active, fruitful, vigorous intellect, to allow himself to become a mental sluggard. He was too ambitious, as well as too conscientious, to be willing to sink to the low level of the mere routinist. The duty of working earnestly to keep up with his profession was, in his eyes, of equal importance with that of preparing for it at the outset.

Thus loving his profession, and thus devoting himself to its studies, we would naturally expect to find him not deficient in faithful attention to the necessities and wants of the sick. Prompt to attend their call, punctual to his engagements with them, he bore himself with such graceful ease, and kindness, and gentleness in the sick-room, and yet with such self-possession, and evident assurance of being at home *there*, as to win the confidence as well as love and gratitude of his patients. And although, as a practitioner in a city with an able faculty, well established in their respective spheres, and where he labored under the disadvantage of being at home, he was still but a young

doctor at the time of his decease, he yet had the satisfaction of knowing that these qualities were highly appreciated by the public. For notwithstanding his utter aversion to show, and refusal to push himself forward, few physicians in Nashville have, in the same term of service, obtained so wide and influential and valuable a practice.

He was equally faithful and correct in the discharge of his duty towards his brethren of the same profession. A high-toned gentleman, he was far above any of those unworthy practices by which members of the profession too often degrade themselves, in endeavoring unduly to advance their own interests at the expense of their fellow-physicians. He avoided, as he would a plague-spot, every approach to any thing like depreciation of the skill, knowledge, or ability of others, in order indirectly to exalt his own. In his intercourse with their patients he was scrupulously guarded, that he might by no possibility impose himself upon them, or utter any word that would undermine their confidence in their physicians. In his personal behavior to his fellows he was kind, respectful, courteous, and was a favorite with the profession of the city. Having no envy or jealousy in his composition, he was ever ready to accord to others their due meed of praise for learning and skill, and not unhappy at witnessing their well-earned success. Few men have, in turn, met with so hearty and cheerful a recognition of professional ability and worth.



An amusing incident, occurring early in his professional life, is related of him, which well illustrates his conscientious faithfulness to his patients, and at the same time his energetic contempt for unprofessional meanness, and characteristic determination not to be imposed upon. He had a case of dislocation, which he could not succeed in reducing. After several attempts, he very honestly told his patient, that although he had failed, yet the injury could be and ought to be remedied, and advised him to send for another doctor. Accordingly Dr. ——— was called in. So delighted was he to be sent for in a case which Dr. Porter had given up, that he must needs make the circuit of the city to let his medical acquaintance know how great a man he was. Some of them, astonished that so poor a stick should be called upon to supply the lack of service of a man of Porter's recognized ability and skill, mentioned to the latter how his substitute was endeavoring to make capital at his expense. The Doctor at once called for his buggy, drove to his out-of-joint patient, ordered him down on his back, and in a trice had his arm in place. Dr. ——— arrived soon after, and to his astonishment found that Dr. Porter had not failed.

Among the characteristics of the good physician there is one, the most lovely for its moral beauty and excellence, the most noble for the self-sacrificing spirit it demands, and the most divine because of the vast amount of misery it

relieves without money and without price, which is especially the glory and the crown of the medical profession. It is a devotion to the wants of the poor with the same zeal, patience, attention and care, as though they were the richest of the land; a devotion, too, ever most needed and most practised in times of extensive epidemics and frightful pestilences; a devotion which demands for the physician's calling the courage and self-immolating spirit of the soldier, without being sustained by the stimulus of company, and excited to action by the pomp and circumstance of war; a devotion than which humanity calls into play and requires none higher.

This element of the physician's character belonged in an eminent degree to Dr. Porter. He seems to have regarded it as one of the highest privileges of the profession, and was ever ready to recognize his obligations to work accordingly. He admired and applauded this devotion in others. He was ready to practise it himself. While a medical student he writes from Paris: "But I must be allowed to pay a tribute of respect to certain members of that [the Roman Catholic] denomination—the Sisters of Charity. They have won my admiration. They serve in all the hospitals here, and I have seen them so often administering consolation to the sick and the dying, that I cannot look upon them with other than feelings of the highest regard. A short time ago I was following an eminent physician through

his wards at the hospital, and we came to the bed of a patient whose face was covered with the eruption of that loathsome disease, the small-pox. The sight was hideous. By his side was standing a beautiful girl, with all the bloom and freshness and modesty of youth upon her cheek. I paused a moment to admire her devotion, and then hurried away to escape the contagion."

A few years have passed away: the scene is changed from the banks of the beautiful Seine, with its crowded population, to the banks of the distant but no less beautiful Cumberland. His own dying-hour is at hand. He is called to leave every thing that makes life desirable—family, friends, estate, and honorable usefulness. His bedside is surrounded by those who weep as kindred and intimate associates; and there too are the Sisters of Charity, devoted in their kind offices, and as earnest in their grief as though they watched by the bedside of a brother. And so it is; for they are there not because he has need, but because they have so often met him ministering to the sick poor, and combating the dreaded pestilence with like faith and zeal as themselves.

But time will not permit me to dwell upon these points as I would wish. As a summing up, I may say that the professional character of our late colleague has always seemed to me to come as near as possible to a realization

of the principles of the Hippocratic oath, combined with a humanizing Christian element.\*

We must now very briefly refer to Dr. Porter's public life as Professor of Anatomy in the University of Nashville, and as one of the founders of its flourishing Medical Department.

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\* This famous ancient code of Medical Ethics, drawn up by Hippocrates, or at least as ancient as his times, is thus rendered in Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities: "I swear by Apollo the Physician, by Esculapius, by Hygeia and Panacea, and all the gods and goddesses, calling them to witness that I will fulfil religiously, according to the best of my power and judgment, the solemn promise and the written bond which I now do make. I will honor as my parents the master who taught me this art, and endeavor to minister to all his necessities. I will consider his children as my own brothers, and will teach them my profession, should they express a desire to follow it, without remuneration or written bond. I will admit to my lessons, my discourses, and all my other methods of teaching, my own sons, and those of my tutor, and those who have been inscribed as pupils, and have taken the medical oath; but no one else. I will prescribe such a course of regimen as may be best suited to the condition of my patients, according to the best of my power and judgment, seeking to preserve them from any thing that might prove injurious. No inducement shall ever lead me to administer poison, nor will I ever be the author of such advice; neither will I contribute to an abortion. I will maintain religiously the purity and integrity both of my conduct and of my art. I will not cut any one for the stone, but will leave that operation to those who cultivate it. Into whatever dwellings I may go, I will enter them with the sole view of succoring the sick, abstaining from all injurious views and corruption, especially from any immodest action, towards women or men, freemen or slaves. If during my attendance, or even unprofessionally in common life, I happen to see or hear of any circumstances which should not be revealed, I will consider them a profound secret, and observe on the subject a religious silence. May I, if I rigidly observe this my oath, and do not break it, enjoy good success in life and in my art, and obtain general esteem for ever: should I transgress and become a perjurer, may the reverse be my lot!



As a teacher of Anatomy, Dr. Porter very ably discharged his duty to the class. His preparation for the lecture was always carefully made and in good season. He was punctual to his hour, never keeping the class waiting, nor missing the place assigned him in the programme of lectures. His style of lecturing was by no means fluent and ornate, as was to be expected from his diffidence and reserve, but it was characterized by clearness, exactness, and a minute acquaintance with his subject. He thus succeeded in enlisting the interest of his large classes in the dry branch he had to treat, and held them attentive to his course throughout. Those students who were in earnest about learning—as, to their praise may it be truthfully said, are the far larger proportion of a medical class—held his instructions in high esteem.

He possessed great ability as a writer, as is attested by his articles in the Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery, which were very widely copied. He was also a neat, cool, dexterous, and successful operator in surgical cases. These attainments added much to his standing with the students, and, had his life been prolonged, would doubtless have given him eminent rank as an author and surgeon.

In his personal intercourse with the students, Dr. Porter was kind, affable and dignified. He was not popular in the ordinary acceptation of the term; for in the class, as in the community, he was above seeking popularity. He was

what is far better, beloved and respected. I doubt whether among the many hundred young men to whom he lectured during his five sessions, there was one whose good will he failed to gain. They knew him to be reliable, honest, faithful, conscientious in the discharge of his obligations to them; that as such they could count on him. This is the character and the only character, that ever gains the permanent high opinion of a medical class. Brilliancy, show, popular manners, may make a great impression at first upon a large number of young men, strangers at the school, and eager for growth in knowledge; but without force of character and substantial attainment, the hold thus acquired is soon lost, and the professor rapidly sinks to a lower even than his true level.

In addition to mere teaching by lecture or recitation, there is still a higher function fulfilled by a teacher towards his class, which unhappily is too little regarded, indeed, is generally overlooked, and yet cannot, from its very nature, remain unaccomplished, but must be either well or ill performed. Every one who stands to a class in the capacity of an instructor, imparts to that class something of his own spirit and character. This is a great fact, and holds true whether the class is composed of a single individual, or of hundreds; whether its members are children, youth, or grown-up men and women; whether the subjects taught are of a material or intellectual nature, of a

professional, political, or religious character. This, which has not inaptly been termed unconscious tuition, is outside of the matter taught, and arises altogether from the relation inseparable between teacher and pupil, by which mind is brought in contact with mind, and quietly, imperceptibly, unwittingly, but infallibly, influenced by that contact. Upon this fact depends a chief responsibility resting upon all who in any way undertake the great work of teaching. The divine may preach most scriptural truth, charity, faith, hope; but if he is a narrow-minded, prejudiced man, though his sermons are free from bigotry, his people will yet become bigots. The political orator may declaim eloquently of patriotism, of truth, and justice: if truly honest and sincere, and in earnest, his efforts on the rostrum will produce a highly useful and elevating effect upon the thousands who hear him. If, on the other hand, he is a mere pretender, whose great aim is office, then do his harangues merely train up heated partisans, and set to work unholy strife and contention. These are familiar illustrations, which might be readily multiplied from the primary school upward; and the more we multiply them, the more will we be satisfied of the truth, that mere knowledge of his branch, and aptness to communicate that knowledge, is, by all odds, the least important half of a teacher's qualifications for his work, instead of being all, as is too commonly imagined. In the dignity and weight and influence of this unconscious tuition

Dr. Porter was pre-eminently happy, and its effect was seen in a marked manner upon the class every winter. This is just what we would expect to learn, if the character we have given him as a man was faithfully drawn. And the best proof that our portrait, though roughly sketched, was not exaggerated, is the fact that his influence upon the class was so great and useful, and as such recognized, acknowledged and appreciated by us all, pupils and professors, from the commencement of the school.

We have now reached the last point we have to consider in Dr. Porter's history,—his relations to the Faculty and School of Medicine in this University. When, six years since, he was consulted upon the subject in the very incipency of the undertaking, he at once saw the great necessity for such an institution in this region of country, and was well assured of its certain and speedy success upon the plan proposed. He gave his hearty endorsement to the enterprise of putting in operation a new department of his venerated and loved Alma Mater. But with his characteristic diffidence, and backwardness about speaking in public, he doubted much the propriety of accepting a chair in the school. Even as early as in 1835, while at college, he wrote to a brother in reference to the study of the law, "I am very deficient in one thing essential to a public speaker, 'brass,' and I believe will never get the better of it." This same want of confidence still alarmed him; and it required



great determination to enable him finally to remedy the deficiency.

His objections, however, were overcome by reminding him that with Anatomy he was familiar; that this was one of the leading chairs in the school, and could be filled by no one who was not a faithful, accurate, and laborious student of the branch; and that fluency of speech was secondary to other more important requisites, which were combined in him. He agreed to undertake the work, and from that day forward labored with great zeal and success to advance the interests of the school. Born in Nashville, a graduate of its University, he was imbued with a warm attachment to the scenes of his boyish and youthful days, and a desire to contribute his share towards making his native city not least in renown and influence among her sisters. His extensive travels and thorough personal knowledge of European and Northern institutions had only given him a more lively appreciation of the advantages of this position, and of the ability and fitness of Southern men to develop the schools best fitted to meet the educational wants of their own region.

Hence he was willing to venture largely of his means, time, and labor in the undertaking, much preferring failure on a broad, liberal scale, to success on a moderate, insignificant plan.

As a member of the Faculty, his course was uniformly

such as to justify the language employed by his colleagues on the occasion of his death : “ that they recognized in that event ” the loss of a chief pillar of an institution which his learning, discretion, and sound judgment so largely assisted in founding and developing. He knew what a great seat of medical learning should be ; how extensive the buildings, how costly and varied the means of illustration required. He therefore wished nothing done on a niggardly, illiberal scale ; but every thing so planned and executed that additions could continually be made until the school should become in all respects complete. Time, he was perfectly aware, was needed for its growth ; but time, without a proper basis, he was equally aware, could perfect only an abortion.

He was also well conversant with the disposition of his own Southern people ; their high-minded notions ; their contempt for all (to use their peculiarly significant by-word) *picayune* establishments ; their desire for great and influential schools at home ; their growing indisposition to be tributary, for medical and other learning, to a people who so little comprehended and sympathized with their institutions, customs, and feelings. He therefore heartily endorsed the ground assumed by this Faculty at the outset, that no toil or sacrifice should be spared, on their part, to make the school inferior to none in the Union, and that such inferiority should not, even by implication, be recognized ; that

it should be their work to organize and commence the school on the right basis, being sure that afterwards it would go on to grow and flourish, whether they retained their original, or any positions in it, or not.

The history of the Medical Department of the University has indeed been most remarkable, for the rapidity with which it has found favor with the profession, and assumed the position due to a well-endowed and firmly-established school. Though at its foundation but one of numerous medical colleges in the country, and though since that time some six others have been commenced in the same field, it has become, in the brief period of five years, one of the three leading schools of the United States. Its organization and policy have been, however, not less singular than its history, and have no doubt contributed greatly to the latter. It was organized as an integral branch of an old and noted University, with far more liberal and just views on the subject of medical education than have ever governed a similar Board of Trustees. Its Faculty of six members, none of whom had ever lectured to a medical class, accepted their positions that they might make it a school worthy of its name, and to which Southern young men would not be ashamed to crowd. They claimed no inheritance in their chairs: they were all willing to work long and patiently, if necessary, to build up the school: they were all ready to re-organize and re-arrange, so as to add to their number

distinguished teachers, when they could be had, or as the wants of the school required. In conformity with this elasticity of plan, the celebrated Professors Drake and Cobb were at different times invited to join in the enterprise. Both expressed their strong assurance that a brilliant career awaited the school, and their regrets that pledges made at other places prevented their identifying themselves with its early history. These distinguished men are the only ones who have ever declined offers of position from the school. Others from more southern States than Kentucky, however, were found, who heartily enlisted in the work, and increased the number of professors to seven during its first and to eight during its fourth session.

All who are intimately acquainted with American schools of medicine, know full well that they are institutions of a very complex nature, requiring indispensably several elements of success besides great teaching ability in the Faculty. The elucidation of this statement would furnish curious and profitable matter for an hour's discussion. To the initiated the mere statement is sufficient. Now in all matters connected with the business and internal affairs of the school, our colleague's sound judgment, extensive acquirement, and reliable character, has, from its first conception, been of the greatest service; and while the Medical Department of the University of Nashville remains an ornament and a glory to this city and State, so long will it keep



fresh the memory of the patriotism, learning, and ability of Robert M. Porter.

Standing in this sacred desk, and with the audience before me composed in so great part of young men and youth, I cannot close the duty assigned me to-day without urging upon your attention several important practical conclusions strikingly enforced by the history of the life and character we have been considering.

We have in Dr. Porter's life an example of the truly self-made man; that is, of a man who, not by the force of extraneous circumstances, but by the exercise of his own intellectual and moral faculties, rises to eminent usefulness and honor in his day. This is the proper definition of the self-made man, though somewhat different from the ordinary notion of one who makes his way in life notwithstanding opposing obstacles and difficulties, such as poverty, want of friends, and limited means of gaining knowledge. This latter notion is entirely too limited, and by implication unjust and erroneous. Poverty, instead of an obstacle, may rather be considered an aid to success, furnishing as it does a most powerful motive for exertion. And he who makes his way notwithstanding that he is poor and unknown, and has few helps to learning, does so because he faithfully uses the powers of mind, body, and soul which God has given him. Diligence, activity, energy, prudence, lead to wealth and renown; uprightness, meekness, and other virtues, to

esteem and honor. Now the young man who on his entrance into life is blessed with fortune, friends, and all the advantages of education, will never make his way, will never have rank and station in society as successful in public or private life, unless he brings into active play precisely the same qualities. And, par excellence, he should rather be styled self-made, who, though possessing wealth and friends, and a satisfactory station in society, by the exertions of those who have gone before him, diligently applies himself to work, and makes himself somebody on his own behalf, while all the time the natural laziness of human nature, untasked by necessity, would urge him to inaction.

Professor Porter was left, by the death of his father when quite a youth, pretty much master of his own movements, and with a handsome competence secured to him. Yet you have seen how hard he worked. Year after year he passed in as faithful application to his various studies, as though he had no property and no friends to help him through the world. "I abominate doing nothing," was his energetic expression at Princeton. This steady application and faithful trueness to himself made him—and nothing less will ever make any of you, young gentlemen—distinguished from the common herd of inert, sluggish men who eat, drink, sleep, live and die. Genius will not make you: wealth is only an impediment in your way, unless,

with almost unearthly watchfulness, you guard against its siren seductions: able teachers, books, time for study, all are mere circumstances, favoring your progress, but of no avail without self-control, self-reliance, and earnest personal effort.

The great value and utility of a long and varied course of instruction and of thorough preparation, as enabling its possessor to take at once a high rank in his calling, is well exemplified in the case before us. Our young men are in too great haste to get to work, and hence multitudes of them enter upon the active work of life after very slender training for the same. A lamentable mistake, condemning them for ever to a position of mere mediocrity, unless they afterwards—which is rarely the case—master the principles upon which their callings depend.

Again, we see most strikingly enforced the fact that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. We may plan and arrange the future course of our lives ever so surely and wisely, as we think, but for the most part our plans are altogether changed by circumstances beyond our control, or else the details are quite differently arranged, and in many cases we are brought to engage in the very pursuits which we have been endeavoring to avoid. We have seen how Dr. Porter would not enter upon the duties either of the lawyer or the minister, because he dreaded public speaking: he consequently devoted himself to medicine. Yet

this very pursuit brought him into a position where it was his almost daily function to address large audiences of young men, (for half the year,) and just as much compelled him to overcome this natural distaste as would either of the other professions, and under circumstances more difficult and trying than usually attend the beginner in those professions. Still no portion of his days was really happier, or furnished more satisfaction to himself. Man may devise, but God directs.

Lastly and most forcibly of all, this history teaches us the utter uncertainty of human life.

Dr. Porter was, with one exception, the youngest of a Faculty composed of eight members: he was of robust stature, a strongly-knit frame, and bade fair to enjoy many years to come. At the time of his decease he was arranging his affairs so as to make him independent of the drudgery of his profession, and give him leisure for perfecting himself as a teacher and for scientific research. Five months since, and we all predicted for him length of days, prosperity, and long-continued usefulness. A brief, unforeseen, and unusual disease, rapidly and suddenly changed all this; and nothing now remains to us but the memory of a life well spent.

In this large audience, now listening with sympathizing interest, composed of every age, from the college lad to the venerable and revered patriarchs of our district, there is not



one of whom we can say, Thou shalt be next : there is not one to whom we can say, To-morrow is thine. One fact alone is certain, that but a few years shall elapse ere every one now here shall have ceased to live : ere the grave shall be our home, and this glorious world, with all its pomp and splendor, variety and beauty, a thing of naught to us.

Were this the end, then on all such occasions—and often do they come—we would be compelled in sorrow to exclaim, Vanity of vanities ! vanity of vanities ! all is vanity !

But this is not the end. Whatever may have been the fears and hopes and uncertain beliefs of the sages of Greece and Egypt, of Persia and India ; whatever are the gloomy apprehensions or vague doubts of nations now flourishing in other portions of this earth, we have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place ; which teaches us that they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

As our friend, preceptor, and brother gave heed to these great truths of God's word, and though untimely, as men say, called away, yielded a willing, contented, trusting obedience to the unlooked-for summons, so let us herein imitate his example, and we too shall find that our faith and hope are built upon a rock.

The soul decays not : freed from earth  
And earthly toils, it bursts away :  
Receiving a celestial birth,  
And spurning off its bonds of clay,  
It soars and seeks another sphere,  
And blooms through Heaven's eternal year.

Do good, shun evil : live not thou,  
As if in death thy being died ;  
Nor Error's siren voice allow  
To draw thy steps from truth aside :  
Look to the journey's end—the grave !  
And trust in Him whose arm can save.

## APPENDIX.

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[From the Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery, August 1856.]

**Death of Professor R. M. Porter, M.D.**

SINCE our last issue, the grave has claimed our friend and colleague, Dr. R. M. Porter. Those who have so often looked upon his manly form and pleasant face in the amphitheatre, in society, and at the sick-bed, will see him no more for ever. Of all the men we have ever known, he was the most unobtrusive and unpretending. A scholar, in the most circumscribed and rigid acceptation of the term, and MASTER in ALL of the learned professions, he walked about among men with maiden modesty and the frankness and simplicity of childhood. A nobler heart never pulsed in the bosom of man, for he was the very soul of honor. The last of the following resolutions of the Faculty will explain why we do not extend this article. Full justice will be done this truly great man by a far more able hand than wields this pen, which, nevertheless, is ready to exalt the memory of one whom as a man we loved, as a colleague we admired in full and abiding confidence, and, as a brother, had our warmest sympathies and our most exalted regard.

TRIBUTE OF RESPECT TO THE MEMORY OF DR. ROBERT M.  
PORTER.

At a meeting of the physicians of Nashville, Dr. Boyd M'Nairy being called to the chair, and Dr. G. A. J. Mayfield appointed Secretary, on motion of Dr. J. D. Winston, the Chair nominated a committee to draft resolutions in relation to the death of the lamented Dr. ROBERT M. PORTER, consisting of Drs. Atchison, Morton, and Nichol, who reported the following, which was adopted :

WHEREAS, It has pleased Divine Providence to remove from our midst our friend and brother, Dr. Robert M. Porter; we, who have shared his toils, and witnessed his unsparing devotion to the highest and holiest duties of a self-sacrificing profession, may be permitted to voice our grief for his untimely loss. He has been cut down in the prime of manhood, in the ripeness of intellect, and in the zenith of usefulness. In him, suffering humanity has lost a friend, society an ornament, and science an ardent devotee. With wealth, he preserved the meek spirit of a Christian; with learning, the modest simplicity of a child: neither pride of place nor consciousness of superior intellectual attainments ever made him forgetful of those kindly courtesies and gentle amenities which so distinguished his private and professional intercourse. In early life, he entered the academic halls of his native State, and won



the highest honors ; going thence to Cambridge, he entered upon the study of law, enriching his mind with its broad principles : he then turned his attention to the higher walks of Divinity, where the purity of his heart found its congenial affinities. But that modesty for which he was distinguished, deterred him from the pursuit of a profession requiring a prominence from which he shrank : he next turned his attention to the study of medicine, and in its quiet and unobtrusive walks, its labors of love, and unheralded triumphs over disease and death, found that theatre of action best suited to his unpretending modesty, active philanthropy, and Christian benevolence. As an expression of our appreciation of his worth as a man, his ripe attainments as a scholar, and usefulness as a physician, be it, therefore,

RESOLVED, That in the death of Dr. R. M. Porter, society has lost an exemplary Christian, science a bright ornament, and our profession one of its most honored and esteemed members.

RESOLVED, That while we refrain from obtruding stereotyped expressions of condolence upon the afflicted family, we may be permitted to mingle our sincere sympathies with their deep sorrow for a bereavement so untimely, so mournful, and so irreparable.

RESOLVED, That in testimony of respect for the deceased, we wear the usual badge of mourning for thirty days.

Dr. J. D. Winston then moved the publication of the proceedings of the meeting in the city papers; and Dr. Morton, the furnishing with the same the family of the deceased; both of which motions were adopted.

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THE Students of the Medical Department of the University of Nashville having met for the purpose of giving expression of their feelings in reference to the death of the lamented R. M. Porter, Professor of Anatomy; C. H. Gunn, of Massachusetts; J. W. Brown, of Tennessee; J. M. Driver, of Louisiana; L. J. Applewhite, of Georgia; J. R. G. Faucette, of North Carolina; N. Miller, of Alabama; G. T. Bartlett, of Missouri; E. M. Dupree, of South Carolina; D. H. Armstrong, of Mississippi; and W. G. Daniel, of Texas, were appointed by the Chair to draft resolutions, who reported the following preamble and resolutions, which were unanimously adopted:

WHEREAS, We have received the painful intelligence of the death of our beloved Professor, R. M. Porter, M. D.:

RESOLVED, That we submit with all becoming humility to this dispensation of the Supreme Architect of the Universe, while we deeply deplore the loss of so estimable a man.

RESOLVED, That in the loss of Dr. Porter, the profession

is deprived of one of its brightest ornaments, the Medical Department of the University of Nashville of one of its most efficient teachers, his family of an affectionate husband and parent, and the community at large of one of their best citizens.

RESOLVED, That his private, public, and professional character all evince the belief that in his removal from this life of usefulness, Divine Providence has called him to that "building of God—that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

RESOLVED, That we tender to the surviving relatives of Dr. Porter our heartfelt sympathy in this their sad bereavement.

RESOLVED, That we deeply sympathize with the Medical Faculty in the loss of their most worthy colleague, Dr. R. M. Porter.

RESOLVED, That the proceedings of this meeting be published in the Medical Journal and city papers, and that a copy be sent to the family of the deceased.

W. H. CHILDRESS, of Tennessee, Pres't.

H. M. COMPTON, of Texas, Sec'y.

At a meeting of the Medical Faculty of the University of Nashville, held at 11 o'clock, A. M., on the 1st day of July, 1856, it was announced to the Faculty that their

colleague, Professor R. M. Porter, M. D., had that morning, between the hours of 7 and 8, after a severe affliction of more than two weeks' duration, departed this life.

Drs. W. K. Bowling and T. R. Jennings were appointed a committee to draft resolutions expressive of the feelings of the Faculty in relation to this sad event; whereupon, the chairman of this committee reported the following preamble and resolutions, which were unanimously adopted by the Faculty:

WHEREAS, It has pleased God that our fellow-citizen, friend, colleague, and brother, R. M. Porter, should die, and be known no more among men in the flesh, we have thought it right and proper, in justice to his memory, to pass the following resolutions:

RESOLVED, That in the death of R. M. Porter we recognize the loss of a chief pillar of an institution which his learning, discretion, and sound judgment so largely assisted in founding and developing.

RESOLVED, That in the many relations which our late colleague sustained toward us, he so bore himself that our affection, regard, and confidence were strengthened and deepened by each passing year; that to a mind deeply imbued with medical learning, he added the pleasantness of the accomplished gentleman, and was in all things what the good everywhere delight to honor.



RESOLVED, That the Chancellor of the University be requested, at the opening of the next session of the Medical Department, to deliver a public address upon the life and character of our departed friend and brother.





